



## GeekSpeak

## Jost Zetsche

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### Captain Sutter's Story

**I was sitting** *one afternoon, (...) just after my siesta, (...) when I was interrupted by Mr. Marshall (...) bursting hurriedly into the room. From the unusual agitation in his manner I imagined that something serious had occurred, and, as we involuntarily do in this part of the world, I at once glanced to see if my rifle was in its proper place. (...) When he had recovered himself a little, he told me that, however great my surprise might be at his unexpected reappearance, it would be much greater when I heard the intelligence he had come to bring me. 'Intelligence,' he added, 'which if properly profited by, would put both of us in possession of unheard-of-wealth—millions and millions of dollars, in fact.' (...) When I heard that I thought something had touched Marshall's brain, when suddenly all my misgivings were put at an end to by his flinging on the table a handful of scales of pure virgin gold. I was fairly thunderstruck and asked him to explain what all this meant (...). Early in the morning (...), Mr. Marshall was walking along the left Bank of the stream when he perceived something which he at first took for a piece of opal, a dark transparent stone, very common here—glittering on one of the spots laid bare by the suddenly crumbling away of the bank. He paid not attention to this, but while he was giving directions to the workmen, having observed several similar glittering fragments, his curiosity was so far excited, that he stooped down and picked one of them up. 'Do you know,' said Mr. Marshall to me, 'I positively debated within myself two or three times whether I should take the trouble to bend my back to pick up one of the pieces and had decided on not doing so when farther on, another glittering morsel caught my eye—the largest of the pieces now before you. I conde-*

*scended to pick it up, and to my astonishment found that it was a thin scale of what appears to be pure gold'*

(quoted in: [www.sfmuseum.net/hist2/gold2.html](http://www.sfmuseum.net/hist2/gold2.html)).

Yes, John Sutter's 1854 recollection of the discovery of gold that started the California Gold Rush is a long quote. And, no, its relationship to the *GeekSpeak* column may not be immediately apparent. But I was *thrilled* when I found it because it illustrates so well what I want to communicate.

When Sutter and James Marshall built their sawmill, they never even dreamed about finding gold, let alone changing the course of history for their part of the world. But that is what happened. News traveled fast. The influx of fortune seekers was so massive that eventually there was no place left for Marshall and Sutter, and they both died in poverty.

Well, I would like to avoid their fate, but I am here (once again) to announce that, very much like Sutter and Marshall, we are also sitting on great treasures, treasures that so far have yielded only a fraction of the riches they might contain.

Of course, I am talking about translation memories (TMs). Most of us use tools—I like to call them TEnTs (translation environment tools)—that allow us to build up TMs as we translate. We use them to leverage their gradually built-up content for fuzzy and perfect matches, and some of us also perform terminology searches in them (“concordance searches”).

And yet there is so much more that we could do.

Here are the most obvious uses. You have probably heard about these, but I am betting many of you have not taken the trouble to bend down and pick up these nuggets.

- **TM authoring:** Veteran readers know that this refers to using the bilingual (or polylingual) TM as a resource for the monolingual creation of new text. And why not use the content that we have assembled in TMs to author new texts in the source language? Imagine how many potential matches there would be if you based a new text on an (old) TM. Or imagine the strengthening of your position if you could offer your clients not only translation but also authoring—or at least training for their own authors.

- **Term extraction:** Despite Sue-Ellen Wright's and others' notable efforts, terminology work remains the stepchild of translation. The databases that could hold our most intelligent of data (terminology databases) are often neglected or not used at all, even though they are a basic part of every TEnT. The main reason is that it is hard work to build them up. There is nothing of the ease of feeding a TM that grows as you translate; instead, you more or less have to manually enter the data. This is where term extraction comes into play. Rather than manually sending term pairs one by one, you can use readily available tools to intelligently extract terminology data from your existing TMs. All you have to do is say yea or nay to the proposed term pairs.

- **Shared memories:** This is the least mature, but potentially the biggest of all the missed nuggets. I predict that 10 years down the road we will look back on the way we did translation in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century and shudder. Just as we cringe today when we look back on the pre-PC days when

there just was not enough Wite-Out to correct all the errors we made on the typewriter, we will be horrified someday soon by the thought that we all used to waste so much time building up our *little* personal TMs that we benefitted from a *little*. Ten years down the road we will have found ways to truly share data. And just as there are already tools for

TM authoring and term extraction (that we tend to ignore), there are already plenty of approaches and tools for data sharing.

Happily, unlike Sutter and Marshall, we do not have to fear being pushed out by someone else. In fact, it is just the opposite: the more nuggets we share, the more we get.

Happy panning!



The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost also publishes a free technical newsletter for translators ([www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit](http://www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit)).